# Sixty-fourth Report of Session 2022–23

## The Home Office

## The Emergency Services Network

### Introduction from the Committee

All 108 police, fire and ambulance services in England, Scotland and Wales communicate using Airwave, a dedicated mobile communications network that is critical to their ability to do their jobs. Airwave performs well but is becoming obsolescent, is expensive and does not provide access to modern data services. The Department is replacing Airwave with the Emergency Services Network (ESN), which will use a commercial mobile phone network and so be cheaper whilst also providing modern data. In 2015, the Department awarded contracts to deliver ESN to EE, for the main network infrastructure, and to Motorola for software to replicate critical features, such as push-to-talk – the ability to be connected to a control room or another device at the push of a button, which Airwave has but which commercial mobile phone networks do not support.

The programme to deliver ESN has faced significant delays and was reset in 2018. We have questioned the Department about its management of ESN 13 times, and issued three reports, each finding the programme to be high risk and raising concerns about the department's ability to manage those risks. One such risk related to Motorola's dual position as owner of Airwave, and key supplier to ESN. In April 2021, the Home Office wrote to the Competition & Markets Authority (CMA) expressing concerns over Airwave's excessive profits and Motorola's weak incentives to complete ESN. To prevent the CMA from forcing it to sell Airwave, Motorola announced in November 2021 that it would leave ESN. The Department is currently looking for a new supplier to replace Motorola. Other parts of the ESN programme have also made less progress than expected, and the Department currently has no firm estimates of when it will finish building ESN or what it will cost.

Based on a report by the National Audit Office, the Committee took evidence on Monday 27 March 2023 from the Home Office. The Committee published its report on 14 July 2023. This is the government's response to the Committee's report.

### Relevant reports

- NAO report: Progress with delivering the Emergency Services Network Session 2022-23 (HC 1170)
- PAC report: The Emergency Services Network Sixty-Fourth Report of Session 2022–23 (HC 1006)

### Government response to the Committee

***1. PAC conclusion: The department is still far too optimistic about both the progress it has made and the challenges ahead, and therefore risks repeating the same mistakes again.***

***1. PAC recommendation: The department should test its confidence in its ability to deliver ESN by having the programme's Independent Assurance Panel publish an overview of progress and risks once the new user services contract that replaces Motorola is in place.***

1.1 The government agrees with the Committee's recommendation.

**Target completion date: end of June 2024 following Lot 2 award**

1.2 The Independent Assurance Panel (IAP) has worked with the programme for several years and produced a number of reports. It is tasked by, and reports directly to, the Home Office (the department's) finance and investment committee on behalf of the Permanent Secretary.

1.3 The department is fully focussed on the programme challenges and will commission an overall report after the new supplier has been appointed. The department will task the IAP on specific topics based on the programme's progress as it develops.

1.4 The last IAP review endorsed the Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP) strategic direction and concluded that it represents far superior value for money than delaying, pausing, restructuring, or ending the programme.

1.5 The IAP review confirmed that nearly all countries are on the same journey as the UK, that the global marketplace is now sufficiently diverse, and that the competition to find an alternative supplier to Motorola will attract bids from a wide range of companies. This conclusion reinforces the programme's own international comparative research.

1.6 The Home Office has delivered a large proportion of the technical programme of work required to start mass transition. The technical solutions for aircraft use between 500 and 10,000 feet has been proven. A successful coastline survey of Great Britain has proven the solution up to 12 miles out to sea. Over 700 of the 1000-plus new masts required have been built and are in operation; the programme is on course for completing 292 rural and remote masts by the end of 2024. Coverage has been provided in 71 special locations, and the programme is on track to provide coverage in the London Underground by the end of 2024.

1.7 The IAP will continue to provide critical assessment and challenge throughout the life of the programme.

1.8 There will be a number of progress reports at various stages through the procurement process.

***2. PAC conclusion: The department's failure to deliver ESN creates a significant cost for the emergency services who must pay to fund ESN and to maintain Airwave for longer.***

***2. PAC recommendation: As part of the new ESN business case, the department should explore with users how savings created by the CMA imposing a charge control on Airwave can be used to help fund transition activities and new Airwave devices as well as maintaining Airwave***

2.1 The government agrees with the Committee's recommendation.

**Target implementation date: end December 2023**

2.2 If the CMA decision is upheld following appeal, and the charge control comes into effect, there will be scope to reduce local costs for users of the Airwave service and the department will continue to engage with users to determine how best to support user organisations with transition activities.

2.3 Scope for central support is limited by the way government funds are allocated across departments, policy areas and programmes. This will constrain the ability to pass the charge control savings directly onto users.

2.4 The reduced costs of Airwave will result in an overall government saving, rather than a department or programme gain. Funding decisions beyond the financial year 2024/25 are subject to future HM Treasury spending reviews based on the programme's approved business case.

2.5 The ESMCP is reviewing the business case to reflect the CMA ruling to impose a charge control and procurement of new suppliers. Users are expected to realise savings from reduced Airwave costs. Delayed spend on ESN devices will offset the cost of new Airwave devices. The programme business case includes agreed principles that govern how costs are allocated centrally or to user groups. These principles can be varied only with agreement from all users and funding sponsor bodies.

2.6 The programme is engaging closely with user organisations to provide support for their transition activities, while operating in accordance with Home Office and HMG governance and funding structures.

***3. PAC conclusion: The department cannot yet prove to the emergency services that ESN will be good enough to replace Airwave.***

***3. PAC recommendation: The department should set out an outline plan for the main building blocks of ESN by the end of 2023, including when they will be prototyped, built, and tested in real world conditions, and which includes sufficient time for testing by emergency services, and allows feedback to be incorporated into the final version of ESN. This information should inform the main business case which we understand is due in the first quarter of 2024.***

3.1 The government agrees with the Committee's recommendation.

**Target implementation date: end December 2023**

3.2 The department has drafted an outline plan, the ESMCP control plan.

3.3 The control plan shows the main building blocks, dependencies and sequencing, and includes elapsed time contingency. The control plan includes all elements of prototyping, and testing (including real-world testing), as well as the activities leading to user transition and Airwave shutdown. The durations of all phases that affect users (for example, formal 'service acceptance' and transition from Airwave) have been agreed with users. The control plan is now out for consultation with users, and it will be agreed before the end of 2023. The control plan will be turned into a full Programme Plan after the new User Services supplier is confirmed, and their delivery plan is known. In 2024, the programme will return to the Major Projects Review group with a business case, budget and clear plan, prior to the award of the User Services contract.

***4. PAC conclusion: We remain concerned the department does not have the capability to successfully bring the various elements of ESN together.***

***4. PAC recommendation: By the time the new user services contract is in place, the department should obtain an independent opinion on whether ESN has a credible integration plan and the resources in place to deliver it.***

4.1 The government agrees with the Committee's recommendation.

**Target implementation date: July 2024**

4.2 The department has concentrated efforts on addressing the complexity of the integration required for success.

4.3 The department will commission the IAP to monitor, comment on and assure both the integration plans of the bidders for the User Services contract; the later delivery of them by the successful consortium; the appropriateness and scale of the resources dedicated to it; and the overall integration with the mobile services contract.

4.4 The Home Office continues to strengthen the core capabilities of the Programme Management team, by recruiting experienced specialists and by establishing partnerships with external technical delivery experts. This includes ensuring the Home Office procures the full range of technical capabilities required from the new Lot 2 supplier.

***5. PAC conclusion: It is still not clear how the department will ensure that there are clearly defined responsibilities or plans in place for operating ESN as a live service, raising questions about whether ESN will provide the intended benefits for the emergency services.***

***5. PAC recommendation: As part of the new business case, the department should create a plan for how it will restart work on how ESN will operate as a live service and ensure the emergency services agree that the future operating model meets their needs.***

5.1 The government agrees with the Committee's recommendation.

**Target implementation date: March 2024**

5.2 The government agrees with the need to ensure there are clear responsibilities and plans in place for operating ESN when it goes live.

5.3 The department's current contracts define the core elements of the live service model, including the roles of the key suppliers for User Services, Mobile Services, and other suppliers.

5.4 The User Services supplier will take on the role as 'Service Integrator' providing all user groups with a single 'entry point' for service and support. Following Motorola's exit from the programme, the Department has updated the definition of the Service Integrator role based on experience to date.

5.5 The department has developed a new model for User Organisation billing, which will be implemented through the new User Services contract.

5.6 The Programme Manager will work with the Leadership team, users, suppliers and recently appointed Live Service Manager to complete definition and implementation of the overall Programme Operating model.

***6. PAC conclusion: The department risks creating a new monopoly supplier in EE, which could reduce long-term value for money.***

***6. PAC recommendation: The department should ensure that the new EE contract for ESN network infrastructure includes sufficient protection against EE making excessive profits and requires all infrastructure to fully comply with telecommunications standards and allows other network suppliers to be introduced in future if they are better value.***

6.1 The government agrees with the Committee's recommendation.

**Target implementation date: December 2023**

6.2 Home Office commercial officials and Cabinet Commercial Services have reviewed the non-binding heads of terms, and independent economists and commercial lawyers have critiqued these reviews to ensure to the greatest extent possible that a contract based upon these terms represents value for money.

6.3 The new contract with telecommunications company EE will be awarded on an open book basis with a gain share mechanism built in. This will give us visibility over their costs and gross profit margin, with any savings made through, for example, greater efficiency, being shared between EE and the Home Office.

6.4 The new contract will be structured to allow for the Home Office to reprocure all ESN suppliers around 2 years after programme completion.

6.5 The entire programme is being delivered in line with international technical standards. This will enable commercial competition for the supply of all elements at regular intervals.